



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE ARRESTS 6 SMUGGLERS, 88 ILLEGAL ALIENS DURING WEEKEND** *Mexicans, Ecuadorians, Colombians, 2 pregnant women and a child among the groups*

EL PASO, Texas — Six suspected alien smugglers in four separate cases, which included 88 illegal aliens, were arrested here and in New Mexico this weekend by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Border Patrol agents.

On Saturday, ICE special agents arrested Juan Burciaga, 28, a truck driver and U.S. citizen from Raymondville, Texas, after finding 44 aliens inside a trailer parked behind the Petro Stopping Center on Interstate Highway 10 and Horizon Boulevard. Border Patrol agents received an anonymous call, and forwarded the tip to ICE agents, who responded to the scene about 2:30 a.m.

On Friday, Manuel Martinez, 31, of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, was arrested along with 14 aliens who were occupying three rooms at the American Best Value Inn on North Mesa St. One woman in the group was pregnant. Martinez, who entered the country illegally himself, is charged with conspiracy to transport illegal aliens.

About 9:45 p.m. Friday, agents arrested another suspected smuggler, Leonardo Armando Sanchez-Villagran, 24, at a Border Patrol checkpoint on Highway 185 south of Hatch, N.M. Nineteen aliens – 14 adult males, two adult females, and three male juveniles – were riding in two 1988 Dodge Ram Chargers. Sanchez-Villagran was driving one of the vehicles. The driver of the other vehicle ran away, and ICE agents are attempting to identify and locate him.

The aliens told agents they were from several Mexican states, including Oaxaca, Coahuila, Veracruz and Puebla. They also said they paid a \$1,500 smuggling fee to be taken to various U.S. locations, including Denver, Atlanta and California.

Also on Friday, Border Patrol agents arrested Antonio Gallegos-Perez, Liliana Gallegos and Jesus Alberto Gallegos-Cases. They are suspected of smuggling and transporting 11 illegal aliens near Sierra Blanca, Texas. The agents arrested the suspected smugglers and aliens who were riding in two separate vehicles. According to court documents, the aliens said they paid \$1,500 each to be smuggled into the country and taken to Dallas.

“It’s not unusual to see this many illegal aliens trying to make it into the United States this time of year. However, lately we’re seeing more of a community willingness to get involved and report this type of criminal activity,” said Ronald J. Wood, ICE El Paso special agent-in-charge. “We value and appreciate the community cooperation. The information the community provides may help us discover these people before they are seriously hurt or killed.” Woods heads the Office of Investigations that includes West Texas and New Mexico.

The aliens in all four groups appeared to be in good health. ICE special agents said that the people arrested Saturday inside the trailer had gallon containers filled with water, but they didn’t have any ventilation in the trailer. Under similar conditions in May 2003, 19 aliens died in Victoria, Texas.

The 44 aliens in the trailer paid their smuggler \$2,000 each and included: 31 Mexicans, four Ecuadorians, and nine Colombians. The 38 adult males, five adult females and a 4-year-old girl were traveling to Dallas; one woman was pregnant. All but two of the Mexican nationals were voluntarily returned to Mexico. The citizens from Ecuador and Colombia were placed in removal proceedings, and are detained at the El Paso Processing Center.

A New Mexico federal magistrate today denied bond for Sanchez-Villagran, and he remains in custody awaiting trial.

Burciaga and Martinez are scheduled to make an initial appearance in El Paso in federal court this afternoon.

ICE special agents are continuing their investigations into all four smuggling groups. CBP Border Patrol agents assisted with the arrests and investigations.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*